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## GUIDELINES FOR A BALANCED TRAINING PROGRAM

Tim Monaco

Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned endurance athlete, finding balance in your training is an on-going challenge. Most athletes are not fully aware of the impact that training and racing have on their bodies, and that exercise and the typical American lifestyle can be a dangerous combination. In this article I will highlight a few factors for you to be aware of as you try to reach your athletic goals.

### Stress Management

One of the most valuable concepts you should understand is what I call “everything counts.” This means that stress can come from many places – your job, your partner, your kids, your family, your diet, the weather, how you slept last night, how hydrated you are, if you are sick, pressure to reach your goals, and so on. Most athletes and the mainstream media seem to believe and circulate the idea that exercise is always good for you, and the more the better! This could not be further from the truth.

Exercise can be dangerous and is often over-used in misguided attempts to lose weight and/or to improve fitness in a short time frame. Exercise must progress in the appropriate manner or else you will pay the price in the form of fatigue, injury, increased body fat, stagnant or decreased performance, and sometimes, even burnout, degeneration and disease. As an endurance athlete you must have a hearty respect for the workouts you do, and keep in mind that every time you do a workout you are adding stress to the equation.

### Rest and Recovery

To improve as an athlete you must stress your system and then recover. Most athletes are good at the stress part but skip over the recovery. Using the “everything counts” concept, you must be aware of each stressor that is affecting you at any given time and be able to determine what your body needs. You should always ask yourself if the workout you have planned is appropriate for the way you are feeling, or if you would be better served with an easy recovery workout or a day off.

It is a delicate balance between training hard and training too hard when you are trying to reach higher levels of fitness. It can be difficult to determine whether you should push yourself or



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take a recovery day. You are bound to have days when you feel extraordinarily tired and sore, and you must learn how to listen to your body when it tells you that it needs a break.

One reliable way to detect overtraining is to monitor your waking heart rate. If it is five or more beats per minute higher than normal, it is a good idea to take a day or two easy. A more subjective way is to begin your normal workout intending to push yourself, and make a choice depending on how you feel or how your body responds. If you feel abnormally tired, or if your perceived effort

is off the charts, it is a good idea to turn your workout into a recovery day.

### Tools to Guide You

Employing a coach to monitor your training and your lifestyle stresses is one of the best ways to keep you on track toward improved fitness. A good coach will use science, experience and intuition to guide you. Every workout, every week of training and every month should have a specific plan to help you avoid the pitfalls of overtraining. Ideally you will be able to plan your training in a way that is realistic, progressive

# One of the most valuable concepts... everything counts.

ansystematic, with consideration for your lifestyle factors. There will always be unforeseen events that come up, but it is possible to plan ahead and stay out of trouble.

If you choose to use them, there are tools at your disposal to help you plan and execute your optimal training program. Using a heart

rate monitor, a power meter on your bike or GPS for running, you can collect and track data to help determine appropriate training and recovery cycles. Training Peaks has created a revolutionary software package that allows the athlete and/or coach to download data files from these devices in order to track and

quantify workouts. I cannot overstate how important these innovations are to athletes and coaches. Anyone who is not using these devices in their workouts is not getting the most out of their training.

## Conclusion

Adapting your training to lifestyle factors will pay huge dividends for your overall health and wellness, make you a better athlete and improve your longevity as an athlete. Learning to listen to your body is necessary to achieve balance in all aspects of your life. Start paying attention to what your body is telling you and you will become much more in tune with your training.

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